Opening Statement
By Chairman Chris Smith
House Subcommittee on Africa, Global Human Rights and International Operations
June 30, 2005

Last March, the Commission for Africa issued a report on how the world's largest economic powers, known collectively as the Group of 8, could work toward raising the living standards of the world's poorest countries. The Commission, established by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, proposed recommendations for action by both African nations and the G8 countries.

African governments were encouraged to improve governance, make further progress on democratization, provide free primary education, improve health systems, expand assistance to orphans and vulnerable children and devote more money for infrastructure construction and repair.

The G8 nations were called upon to double or triple aid flows where funds could be absorbed, forgive 100 percent of debt, move toward grants rather than loans, spend more on the fight against HIV-AIDS, contribute $3 billion annually to peacekeeping operations, spend $500 million annually for 10 years to fund universities and return billions of dollars stolen by corrupt African officials.

The notion of aiding Africans to escape the deadly trap of poverty is not a new one. Former West German Chancellor Willy Brandt called for action to help the developing world in a report 25 years ago. However, while this report was endorsed by the United Nations and taken up by the then-G7, aid levels fell and few of Brandt's recommendations were followed up.

In some quarters, the impression has been conveyed that the United States is somehow selfish in the aid we provide to the world's poor nations. In fact, the United States is the leading donor in terms of cash to developing countries. According to *Foreign Policy* magazine, in 2003, the last year for which we have comparable donor statistics, the United States gave $16.3 billion or a little less than one-quarter of the $69 billion in aid given by the world's top 22 donors.

Still, depending on how you measure development assistance, our size and national income make our aid look less generous than it is. For example, *Foreign Policy* magazine, again citing 2003 information, stated that the United States provided $51 per citizen on official development assistance, which ranked us 16th among the world's donor nations.

Nevertheless, the United States provided $3.2 billion in official development assistance just to Africa last year, which is a significant increase over aid levels to Africa in 2000. Our government is the largest provider of humanitarian assistance to Africa, providing $1.4 billion in aid as of this year. We are providing more than $379 million this year alone in humanitarian assistance for the people of Darfur, Sudan, and the Sudanese refugees who have fled to Chad.

In a major policy speech just this morning, President Bush pledged to increase the funding of malaria prevention and treatment programs in sub-Saharan Africa by more than $1 billion over five years. The goal is to reduce malaria deaths by 50 percent in each of the target countries after three years of implementation and help those countries meet the Roll Back Malaria mortality goal.

Does this mean we give enough in aid? Certainly I and many of my colleagues believe we can always do more when the need arises. I have supported increased aid for refugee programs, as well as HIV-AIDS and other health programs. For example, I have proposed an increase in spending of $5 million a year for the next two years to treat women suffering obstetric fistula, and I am about to introduce legislation calling for increased in spending from the Global Fund on malaria and tuberculosis.

I also have proposed increasing spending on democracy programs in Zimbabwe by $12 million over the next two years.

I believe the United States has been willing to extend assistance to poor countries in Africa to help improve the standard of living of the millions living on a dollar a day or less. In that effort, it is vital that we determine that our aid is being used effectively. Moreover, we must be able to transmit aid more efficiently in programs such as the Millennium Challenge Account, which signed its first aid contract with Madagascar only last month.

As for debt relief, the United States recently agreed to a debt relief plan that could help as many as 38 African nations escape the often crushing burden of official debt. Among the immediate African beneficiaries of this debt relief are Benin, Burkina Faso, Madagascar, Mauritania, Mozambique and Niger – all among the world's poorest nations. We will receive details of this plan in testimony before our Subcommittee in today's hearing.

I have supported initiatives previously to provide debt relief for poor countries. I favor the Highly Indebted Poor Country Initiative structure of releasing nations from debt obligations in return for them directing those freed resources to health, education and other development priorities. Still, we must make any debt relief process work much better. All too many nations under the HIPC initiative received less benefit under this program than initially envisioned or desired. Debt relief must be real so that the people of Africa have genuine hope for real benefits. Mere rhetoric will not educate a student, heal a suffering hospital patient or provide for an AIDS orphan.

As I stated earlier, the G8 nations have discussed these issues for decades. It is now time for the discussions to produce concrete results. We can continue to put forward proposals for debt relief without accountability, which won't be approved, or we can allow debt discussions to degenerate into bureaucratic details and also see no real relief supplied. People in both camps may have the best intentions, but the bottom line is that the poor remain poor while we continue to debate this issue.

What I hope will happen when the G8 meets next week is approval of proposals on aid and debt relief that are not only encouraging, but which will actually produce benefits for the millions of Africans now living in abject poverty.

We are our brother's keeper, and what happens to the poor in a remote village in the most impoverished nation must be important to us. How we demonstrate our caring is a question that finally must be answered.